

Protecting Tennessee's Precious Water Supply - Johnson City Press

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Gov. Bill Haslam has appointed a steering committee of government officials, business leaders and environmental advocates to formulate a plan to protect Tennessee's valuable water supply. A draft of this plan, to be designated TN H2O, is expected to be on the governor's desk by October.

Haslam said protecting the availability of a clean and reliable water supply in Tennessee is vital to support this state's growing population and sustain economic growth.

"Abundant, clean water has been a strategic advantage for Tennessee and is critical to our quality of life," Haslam said in a news release. "We need to ensure this critical natural resource is managed appropriately as our state continues to grow and prosper."

Concerns about the Memphis Sands Aquifer, an aging drinking water and wastewater infrastructure and interstate battles over water rights have stressed the need for a statewide plan for addressing water availability.

In recent years, state legislators in Georgia have tried a number of schemes to siphon water from the Tennessee River.

Dry conditions across the Southeast have made water supply and river management a key issue for the Tennessee Valley Authority. Cities like Atlanta would love to have access to TVA's water resources. Key to those resources is the Tennessee River, which empties as much water by volume into the Ohio as the much-longer Missouri does into the Mississippi.

A reliable water supply is a community's lifeblood. It's what fuels growth and development. Without it, communities literally dry up and become ghost towns.

Here in Johnson City, administrators have been careful to prepare a long-range plan to address much-needed capital needs in the water and sewer systems.

Municipalities with overburdened or failing sewer systems often find themselves placed under state and federal scrutiny. There are a number of communities in Tennessee that are under moratoriums that prohibit new building permits to be issued until major improvements are made to their systems.

Johnson City officials say they don't want to become one of those areas where development has been strangled by an inadequate water/sewer system.

That's why it has been necessary for the city to make a major investment in improving its infrastructure. The state must be willing to do the same.

That's why we are pleased to hear the governor say he is determined to protect our state's precious water resources for future Tennesseans.